

## Gilāna,dassana Sutta

### The Discourse on the Seeing the Sick

[How the dying lay-disciple Citta counsels the living]

(Sāmyutta Nikāya 41.10/4:303 f)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2006

### Introduction

#### 1 Citta the householder

Citta Gahapati (“the householder”), a seth<sup>1</sup> of the city of Macchikā,saṇḍa—hence, also called Macchikā,saṇḍika—is declared by the Buddha as the foremost of his male lay disciples (A 1:26). It is said that on the day he is born, the whole city is filled knee-deep with flowers of various hues; hence his name, Citta.<sup>2</sup> Citta’s pre-eminence as a lay disciple is attested by the presence of a whole section on teachings connected with him—the **Citta Sāmyutta**—in the Sāmyutta Nikāya.<sup>3</sup> Here is Bodhi’s summary of the contents of the Citta Sāmyutta:

Even when Citta assumes the role of questioner rather than respondent, we are given to understand that he already knows the answers and is posing the questions as a way of starting a Dhamma discussion with the monks. Several times we see him teaching the Dhamma to bhikkhus, and the bhikkhus applaud him as one who has “the eye of wisdom that ranges over the deep Word of the Buddha” [S 41.1, 5, 7]. The portrait of Citta we find in this chapter evinces a genuine historical personality, a layman with wide knowledge of the teaching, deep experience in meditation, sharp wisdom, and a mischievous sense of humour. The humour surfaces in his meeting with the Jain teacher Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, whom he leads into an embarrassing verbal trap [S 41.8]. On meeting an old friend of his, who had been a naked ascetic for thirty years but had gained nothing from his asceticism but nakedness and a shaved head, he claims to have gained such high attainments as the four jhānas and the fruit of non-returning even while living as a householder [S 41.9]. Even his deathbed scene conveys a sense of humour: when his relatives think he is babbling to himself, he is actually teaching the devas a lesson in impermanence [S 41.10].

(S:B 1130 f)

When Mahānāma, one of the first five monks, is walking on almsround in Macchikā,saṇḍa, Citta, is inspired by the former’s demeanour, and invites him for an alms-offering in his own house. At the end of the meal, listening to Mahānāma’s discourse, Citta becomes a stream-winner, and he donates his park, the

<sup>1</sup> “Seth,” *sethi* (Skt *śreṣṭhin*) (V 1:15 f, 271 f, 2: 110 f, 157; S 1:89; J 1:122, 3:367). A *sethī* was, in today’s terminology, “a financier, banker or entrepreneur.” I have rendered it by the common modern Indian word, “**seth**” (or “sett”) (which the Webster’s 3<sup>rd</sup> New International Dictionary defines as “a rich merchant”). According to **I Fiser**, “the *sethī* lent money, and...lent considerable sums...to people living by trade; the *sethī* was a man who had (considerable) wealth and therefore was a valuable connection for all those people who wished to make their living by trade and who needed some initial capital, or may be had a run into debt and sought a way out by changing their way of living” (“The problem of the *Sethi* in Buddhist Jātakas,” *Archiv Orientalni* 24, 1954: 263). See also **U Chakravarti**, *The Social Dimension of Early Buddhism*, 1987:76-79). **Chettiar** (Newari of Kathmandu, *shresta*; Gujarati & Khatri (Khetri of Punjab), *seth*; Malayālam, *cheti*; Tamil *shetti*; Kannada & Tulu, *shetty*, *shettar*, *shetti-gar*; Telugu, *setti*; Sinhala, *seḍḍi*, *heddi*) is a title, commonly used by people of South Indian origin in India and abroad, probably comes from Skt *śreṣṭha* or *śreṣṭhī*. They are a subset of the Vaishya class. *Chitty* is an ancient family name found today in my home-town of Melaka [Malacca], Malaysia, where “Chettiar” is often synonymous with “money lender.” For refs, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chettiar>.

<sup>2</sup> Citta, vl *citra* (P & Skt), variegated, manifold, beautiful. Its other meaning is “mind consciousness,” since they are also variegated and manifold. See PED: *citta*<sup>1</sup> & *citta*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> S 41.1-10/4:281-304.

Ambātak'ārāma, where he also built a monastery for the order.<sup>4</sup> Later, listening to a short discourse by Sāriputta, Citta becomes a once-returned. In due course, listening to Mahānāma's teaching on the analysis (or classification) of the six sense-bases (*saḷāyatana vibhatti*), Citta becomes a non-returned.<sup>5</sup> The Dhammapada Commentary relates how his charity attracted others to give generously so that they minister to both the Buddha's order as well as the multitude.<sup>6</sup>

According to Buddhaghosa, although Citta is not an arhat, he has the analytical wisdom (*paṭisambhiddā*) of a learner (*sekha*).<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Related suttas

In Buddhist spirituality and literature, Citta's dying scene is truly the most famous, second only to the Buddha's own parinirvana.<sup>8</sup> While in other cases, we see the dying being counselled, here we have the dying Citta admonishing his own living relatives. Amongst the suttas where the dying is counselled are the following:

<u>Sutta</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Sutta Discovery</u>
Dhānañjāni Sutta	M 97	Sāriputta guides a dying person to the Brahmā world.	SD 4.11
Anāthapiṇḍik'ovāda Sutta	M 143	The dying Anāthapiṇḍika is counselled	SD 23.9
Chann'ovāda Sutta	M 14	The dying Channa is counselled	SD 11.12
Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta	M 120	How to choose a good rebirth.	SD 3.4
Vakkali Sutta	S 22.87	The dying Vakkali is counselled	SD 8.8
Dīgh'āvu Sutta	S 55.3	The Buddha counsels the dying Dīgh'āvu	SD 23.16
(Gati) Mahānāma Sutta	S 55.21	Mahānāma is reassured of his destiny	SD 23.1
Anāthapiṇḍika Sutta 2	S 55.27	The dying Anāthapiṇḍika is unafraid	SD 23.2b
Nakula Sutta	A 6.16	How a loving wife counsels a dying husband.	SD 5.2

Citta's final teaching, from his deathbed, is remarkable in that he is actually admonishing his relatives and the latter-day lay audience like ourselves to have wise faith in the Three Jewels and practise charity, that is, sharing whatever one has that is "worthy of being given away" (*deyya, dhamma*) with the morally virtuous. Here, it should be understood that charity (*cāga*) includes moral virtue, for one cannot truly practise charity without being morally virtuous. In other words, these are four wonderful qualities that are the foundations leading to the path of stream-winning.

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<sup>4</sup> AA 1:387; DhA 2:74.

<sup>5</sup> AA 1:387.

<sup>6</sup> DhA 5.14/2:73-82.

<sup>7</sup> Vism 14.27/442. The others with the same accomplishment are Ānanda, the layman disciple Dhammika, the householder Upāli, and the laywoman disciple Khujjuttarā.

<sup>8</sup> **Mahāparinibbāna S** (D 16.5.1-6.7/2:137-156) = SD 9.

## The Discourse on the Sick (to Citta)

(S 41.10/4:303 f)

### Deities see the dying Citta

1 Now at the time, Citta the householder was sick, gravely ill and in pain.

2 Then a number of park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest,<sup>9</sup> assembled and said to Citta the householder,

“Make a wish, householder, thus: ‘May I become a wheel-turning monarch in the future!’”

3 When this was said, Citta the householder, said this to the park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest,

“That is impermanent, that is unstable, too. One should abandon that, too, and move on!”

4 When this was said, Citta the householder’s friends and companions, kinsmen and [303] blood relatives, said this to Citta the householder,

“Keep up your mindfulness, young master,<sup>10</sup> don’t babble!”<sup>11</sup>

“What did I say that you speak thus to me: ‘Keep up your mindfulness, young master, don’t babble!’?”

“You said to us: ‘That is impermanent, that is unstable, too. One should abandon that, too, and move on!’”

“That is because park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest, have assembled and said to me, ‘Make a wish, householder, thus: ‘May I become a wheel-turning monarch in the future!’”

And I said to them: ‘That is impermanent, that is unstable, too. One should abandon that, too, and move on!’”

5 “Young master, what advantage do these park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest, see that they speak to you thus?”

“These park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest, think:

‘This Citta the householder is morally virtuous, wholesome by nature. Since he is morally virtuous, if he should wish, “May I become a wheel-turning monarch in the future!” this wish would come true on account of his purity. A righteous king [a dharmarajah], he will provide righteous offerings.’<sup>12</sup>

Seeing this advantage, these park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest, have assembled and said to me, “Make a wish, householder, thus: ‘May I become a wheel-turning monarch in the future!’”

And I said to them: ‘That is impermanent, that is unstable, too. One should abandon that, too, and move on!’”

### Citta’s relatives request his teaching

6 “In that case,<sup>13</sup> young sir, admonish us, too!”

“In that case,<sup>14</sup> you should train yourself thus: [304]

<sup>9</sup> “Deities inhabiting herbal plants...grass,” *osadhī,tiṇa,vanaspatīsu adhivatthā devatā*. Comy: Deities inhabiting herbal plants, myrobalan trees, munja grass, bulrush, etc, and old forest trees (*harītak’āmalakī,ādīsū muñja,-pabbaj’ādīsū vana,jeṭṭha,rukkhesu ca adhivatthā devatā*, SA 3:101). Bodhi renders the element *-vanaspati* (or *-vana-p,pati*) as “forest giants” (S:B 1330); however, I am guided by Comy & CPD: *osadhī,tiṇa,vanaspati*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ayya,putta*.

<sup>11</sup> *Satim ayya,putta upaṭṭhapehi mā vippalapī ti*.

<sup>12</sup> PTS: *dhammiko dhammikam phalam anusarissati* is problematic. Se has *dhammiko dhammikam balam anupadassati*; however, Ce *dhamma,rājā dhammikam balim anuppadassati* (which I follow) is clearly the best reading, fitting this context.

<sup>13</sup> *Tena hi*.

<sup>14</sup> *Tasmā hi..*

(1) THE RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHA<sup>15</sup>

‘We will be accomplished in wise faith in the Buddha, thus:

‘The Blessed One is such:

arhat,

fully self-awakened one,

accomplished in wisdom and conduct,

well-farer,

knower of worlds,

peerless guide of persons to be tamed,<sup>16</sup>

teacher of gods and humans,

awakened,

blessed.’

*iti pi so bhagavā*

*araham*

*sammā,sambuddho*

*vijjā,caraṇa,sampanno*

*sugato*

*loka,vidū*

*anuttaro purisa,damma,sārathī*

*satthā deva,manussānaṃ*

*buddho*

*bhagavā ti*

(2) THE RECOLLECTION OF THE DHARMA<sup>17</sup>

We will be accomplished in wise faith in the Dharma, thus:

‘Well-taught is the Blessed One’s True Teaching,

visible here and now,

immediate,

inviting one to come and see,

accessible,

to be personally known by the wise.’<sup>19</sup>

*svākhyāto*<sup>18</sup> *bhagavatā dhammo*

*sandiṭṭhiko*

*akāliko*

*ehi,passiko*

*opanayiko*

*paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhi ti*

(3) THE RECOLLECTION OF THE SANGHA<sup>20</sup>

We will be accomplished in wise faith in the Sangha, thus:

‘The Blessed One’s community of disciples

keeps to the good way;

the Blessed One’s community of disciples

keeps to the straight way;

the Blessed One’s community of disciples

keeps to the right way;

the Blessed One’s community of disciples

keeps to the proper way.’<sup>21</sup>

*supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho*

*uju,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho*

*ñāya,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho*

*sāmīci,paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho*

<sup>15</sup> The 9 virtues of the Buddha, commented on at Vism 7.1-67/197-213. See **Buddhānussati** = SD 15.7 & **Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 3.4) = SD 15.7b.

<sup>16</sup> **Purisa,damma sārathī**. Here *-damma* (adj) is grd, meaning “to be tamed or restrained,” often spoken of a young bullock (M 1:225, *bala,gāvā damma,gāvā*, “the strong cattle and cattle to be tamed,” ie bulls and young steers); also of other animals: *assa,damma,sārathī*, a horse trainer (A 2:112); It 80. In *purisa,damma sārathī*, fig (“the trainer of the human steer”) of unconverted persons, likened to a refractory bullocks; D 1:62 (wr *-dhamma*) = 2:93 = 3:5; M 2:38; A 2:112; Vv 17.13; cf VvA 86.

<sup>17</sup> The 6 virtues of the Dharma, commented on at Vism 7.68-88/213-218. See **Dhammānussati** = SD 15.9.

<sup>18</sup> This reading is found only here. The usu reading is *svākkhato*.

<sup>19</sup> The Dharma is something that can be seen for oneself (*sandiṭṭhika*); that can be known immediately (*akālika*); that it entails personal verification (*ehi,passika*); that it is accessible (*opanayika*); that it is to be personally realized by the wise (*paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhi*). “The terms all highlight, not the intrinsic nature of the Dhamma, but its relation to human knowledge and understanding. They are all epistemological in import, not ontological; they are concerned with how the Dhamma is known, not with the temporal status of the known.” (Bodhi, 1998 §27/p31 digital ed). Bodhi also notes that “the common rendering of [*opanayiko*] as ‘leading onward’ seems difficult to justify either on etymological grounds or by reference to the texts. The Commentaries take it as an implicit gerundive, *upanetabba*, “to be brought near, to be drawn close to.’ Hence ‘accessible’ may be the English word that best captures the intended sense. (See Vism 7.83 f.)” (Bodhi op cit n44). On the tr of this passage, see Brahmavaṃso, 2003b:59-62.

<sup>20</sup> The 9 virtues of the Sangha, commented on at Vism 7.89-100/218-221. See **Aṭṭha,puggala S** (A 8.59) = SD 15.10a.

These four pairs of persons,  
the eight individuals,  
are this Blessed One's community of disciples:  
worthy of offerings,<sup>22</sup>  
worthy of hospitality,  
worthy of gifts,<sup>23</sup>  
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,  
a supreme field of merit for the world.

*yad idam cattāri purisa,yugāni  
aṭṭha,purisa,puggalā  
esa bhagavato sāvaka,saṅgho  
āhuneyyo  
pāhuneyyo  
dakkhiṇeyyo  
añjali,karaṇīyo  
anuttaram puñña-k,khettaṃ lokassā ti*

(3) CHARITY. Whatsoever there may be in the family that is worthy of being given away, all that we will share in common with the morally virtuous who are wholesome by nature.<sup>24</sup>

You should thus train yourselves.”

7 Then, having inspired in his friends and companions, kinsmen and blood relations, wise faith in the Buddha, and in the Dharma, and in the Sangha, and having them undertake charity,<sup>25</sup> Citta the householder passed away.

— evaṃ —

060424; 060502; 070918; 080326

<sup>21</sup> These seems to be an abrupt break here, with the mention of “These four pairs of persons...” which seems to refer back to some missing passage, which evidently is found in the Skt version: see Introd 3: Saṅghānusmṛti & **Aṭṭha,puggala S 1** (A 4:292 = D 33.3.1(3)/3:255).

<sup>22</sup> *Āhuneyyo*. That is, worthy of receiving sacrifices or offerings. The Skt cognate *āhavanīya* refers to that which was offered as an oblation as in *āhuneyy'aggī*, one of the 3 brahminical sacrificial fires (the one in the east).

<sup>23</sup> *Dakkhiṇeyyo*. Specifically refers to offerings made for the benefit of the departed by way of dedication of merits to them.

<sup>24</sup> *Yam kiñci kule deyya,dhammaṃ sabbantaṃ apaṭivibhattaṃ bhavissati sīlavantehi kalyāṇa,dhammehi ti*, S 4:304 = 5:352 =397.

<sup>25</sup> *Buddhe ca dhamme ca saṅghe ca pasādetvā cāge ca samādapetvā*.